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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 8th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. DINU (Romania)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 106: CURRENT FINANCIAL CRISIS OF THE UNITED NATIONS (continued) (A/46/600 and Add.1-3, A/46/765; A/C.5/47/13)

AGENDA ITEM 107: FINANCIAL EMERGENCY OF THE UNITED NATIONS (continued) (A/46/600 and Add.1-3, A/46/765; A/C.5/47/13)

AGENDA ITEM 124: ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY ASPECTS OF THE FINANCING OF THE UNITED NATIONS PEACE-KEEPING OPERATIONS (continued) (A/46/600 and Add.1-3, A/46/765; A/C.5/47/13)

1. Mr. GHAREKHAN (India) said that his delegation had carefully considered the documents available under agenda items 106 and 107 but noted that there were other documents, in particular the report of the Secretary-General, entitled "An agenda for peace" (A/47/277-S/24111), which were the subject of discussion and deliberation in the concerned intergovernmental bodies. The outcome of those consultations would have an impact on the work of the Fifth Committee. In that context, two high-level groups were addressing that issue, one chaired by the Ambassador of Barbados and the other functioning under the auspices of the Ford Foundation. The recommendations of those groups would clearly have a bearing on the Committee's deliberations. The views of his delegation should therefore be considered preliminary, and India reserved the right to revert to the matter once additional documentation and information became available.

2. The financial situation of the Organization could be considered at various levels. It was possible to take the view that there was no real crisis or emergency, since those items had been on the agenda of the General Assembly for several years and, nevertheless, the Organization appeared to have managed to stay afloat financially. However, the Organization had lived from hand to mouth and on the verge of bankruptcy for far too long, and the time had come to place it on a firm and sound financial footing. As the Organization's chief administrative officer, the Secretary-General was fully within his rights to draw the Assembly's attention, year after year, to the problems that he faced in discharging his mandates, if the situation was not resolved.

3. In order to propose solutions to the problem, it was necessary to examine the underlying causes and the nature of the crisis. In recent years, the magnitude and scale of the Organization's operations and activities, particularly in the field of peace-keeping, had grown significantly, and there had been a concomitant increase in resource requirements. At the same time, the payments situation had remained unchanged or had even worsened, which had escalated financial difficulties. The situation was particularly difficult in the third quarter of each year.

(Mr. Gharekhan, India)

4. If Member States fulfilled their financial obligations in full and on time, the financial crisis would disappear. There could be several reasons for non-payment or delayed payment of obligatory dues. In the past, Member States were told that the Organization, mainly as a result of the cold war, was ineffective and inefficient, that it had a bloated bureaucracy, that it was not financially prudent and that it was therefore necessary to withhold funds in order to bring about reform and revitalization. General Assembly resolution 41/213 represented an important landmark in the process of reform, and the situation was currently entirely different. The demise of the cold war had resulted in an exponential increase in the work of the Organization, which had become an active and effective structure to the point of being, as some might say, interventionist. The faith of the international community in the Organization and its effectiveness had grown significantly. One of the first actions of the new Secretary-General was to restructure and revamp the Secretariat by, inter alia, streamlining the bureaucracy and organizational structures and initiating measures to enhance staff productivity.

5. Why, then, did the financial crisis continue? It was to be hoped that the non-payment of contributions was not due to States' unwillingness to pay but to economic difficulties, which affected developing countries and even some of the major contributors. Perhaps it was also necessary to take account of the fact that financial years in different countries might not coincide with the financial year of the United Nations, which could result in some delay. While those problems must be addressed, the bottom line was that Member States must fulfil their financial obligations.

6. The Secretary-General had made a number of proposals to solve the Organization's financial problems. Of the cluster of proposals relating to the financing of peace-keeping operations, India supported the establishment of a revolving Peace-keeping Reserve Fund to finance initial start-up costs of new peace-keeping operations. The technical details relating to activities to be financed from that Fund and the nature of initial financing of the Fund would, naturally, have to be worked out.

7. While the establishment of the United Nations Peace Endowment Fund was a novel idea, his delegation was not convinced of the viability of that proposal or of the suggestion that funds should be raised from commercial and private sources.

8. The proposal for automatic appropriation of one third of the estimated cost of every new peace-keeping operation should be examined very carefully, especially with regard to the requirement of financial discipline and in view of the fact that it involved the authority of the General Assembly and the Security Council in budgetary and financial matters. The establishment of the Peace-keeping Reserve Fund would make such a mechanism unnecessary.

9. No substantive justification had been provided for the idea of changing the formula for calculating the scale of assessments for peace-keeping

(Mr. Gharekhan, India)

operations. Since that matter was the subject of a related report of the Secretary-General, the Committee would have an opportunity to revert to it later in the session.

10. His delegation was willing to consider favourably the proposals to charge interest on unpaid assessed contributions and to increase the Working Capital Fund which, in spite of increases in the Organization's activities and the biennial budget, had remained at the level of US$ 100 million for several years.

11. The General Assembly had repeatedly considered the proposal to borrow on commercial or concessional terms but had never found the idea acceptable. One reason was that the United Nations was not a profit- or income-generating organization and hence had no source for repayment of its debt obligations other than by increasing the contributions of Member States.

12. The idea of a levy on arms sales and on international air travel were interesting and required a more detailed presentation by the Secretariat than was contained in the report.

13. In conclusion, his delegation supported the proposals to establish a Peace-keeping Reserve Fund and to increase the size of the Working Capital Fund. In the long run, however, the only lasting solution to the Organization's financial problems was the prompt payment of dues by Member States.

14. Mr. OULD MOHAMED MOHMOUD (Mauritania), speaking on behalf of the States members of the Arab Maghreb Union, said that, in spite of the current renaissance of the United Nations and the unprecedented demands being made on it in the areas of peace-keeping and international security as well as economic and social development, the Organization was still suffering very serious financial hardship that imperilled its credibility and effectiveness. The main reason for that precarious financial situation, which had been dragging on for some years, was the late payment of assessed contributions for the regular budget and for peace-keeping operations. If the United Nations was to be able to fulfil its usual tasks and also take on new responsibilities, Member States would have to make available to it adequate financial resources.

15. The States members of the Arab Maghreb Union wish to reiterate their commitment to the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations and undertook to spare no effort to help fulfil its financial obligations, taking into account the economic situation and national budgetary procedures of their respective countries, since they were convinced that the continuation of the Organization's work was wholly dependent on the availability of adequate financial resources.

(Mr. Ould Mohamed Mohmoud, Mauritania)

16. In order to find lasting solutions to the financial crisis, the Secretary-General had put forward a set of proposals and had appointed a group of eminent persons to study the matter and make recommendations. It would have been beneficial to have the contribution of that group of experts in studying the financial crisis of the United Nations, since their recommendations and proposals would have been very useful. Since that input was lacking, the Arab Maghreb Union would confine itself to making a few comments on the Secretary-General's proposals.

17. With regard to the proposal for increasing the Working Capital Fund, the Arab Maghreb Union shared the opinion of the Advisory Committee that the Working Capital Fund was a mechanism designed to guarantee an orderly flow of cash and that any increase in its size should be regarded as a purely technical consequence of the increase of the United Nations budget and not as a partial solution to the Organization's financial crisis.

18. With respect to the proposal that certain norms of the United Nations Financial Regulations should be suspended so as to allow retention of budgetary surpluses, the States members of the Arab Maghreb Union shared the consensus view that the retention of such surpluses could be considered as a temporary measure and that the surpluses would have to be reimbursed to Member States as soon as the financial situation of the Organization permitted.

19. The creation of a Peace-keeping Reserve Fund was a very good proposal that could facilitate the initiation of peace-keeping operations. Its financing should be reviewed in the light of the economic and financial situation of developing countries.

20. The States members of the Arab Maghreb Union noted that the proposal for taking out loans from lending institutions or from the World Bank would involve the payment of interest and would, consequently, impose new financial burdens on Member States, whose obligations were already heavy, particularly in the case of the developing countries group, to which the States members of the Union belonged.

21. The delegations of the States members of the Arab Maghreb Union would take up the Secretary-General's proposals again once the recommendations of the group of experts to examine the financial situation of the United Nations were known. Also, they wished to emphasize that, although the financial viability of the United Nations was a collective responsibility of all Member States, in examining the question of the financing of the Organization's activities the economic plight of the developing countries, and especially of certain of them, should be kept in mind. That in no way diminished the Arab Maghreb Union countries' commitment to the purposes of the United Nations or to its aspiration to establish a fair and equitable new international order.

AGENDA ITEM 102: FINANCIAL REPORTS AND AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS, AND REPORTS OF THE BOARD OF AUDITORS (continued) (A/47/5 and Corr.1, vols. I, II and III, and Add.1 to 3, Add.4 and Corr.1, Add.5 to 7 and Add.8 and Corr.1, A/47/315, A/47/460, A/47/500 and A/47/510)

22. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the Advisory Committee had no comments on the reports of the Secretary-General in documents A/47/460 and A/47/510.

AGENDA ITEM 110: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES (continued) (A/47/7/Add.1, A/47/32, A/47/287, A/47/336; A/C.5/47/1)

23. Ms. ROTHEISER (Austria) said that her delegation, being a member of the Committee on Conferences, supported all the recommendations of the Committee (A/47/32).

24. One of the main issues considered by the Committee was compliance with the six-week rule for the issuance of pre-session documentation. Although that rule was hardly ever respected, it would be too simple to lay the blame for that situation solely on the Office of Conference Services. The causes of that deep-rooted problem were manifold. On the one hand, Member States often asked for unnecessary studies or reports when seeking a compromise solution. On the other hand, the various departments often submitted poor-quality reports or submitted them late. Some delays arose in the Office of Conference Services itself, which had to issue an increasing number of reports with reduced means. Its workload had gone up by 10 per cent due to increased Security Council activity, while the number of its staff had been reduced by the same percentage. Nevertheless, it was surprising to learn that the six-week rule was not even considered when deciding which documents were to be translated on a priority basis. Obviously, there was a serious problem that would have to be tackled from various angles; the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences offered a good starting-point.

25. The introduction of new technology might be the key to solving certain problems, as was indicated in the report of the Secretary-General on the Office of Conference Services (A/47/336). However, the speed at which new technology was being introduced, as foreseen in the medium-term plan for 1992-1997, seemed limited both in scope and as far as duty stations were concerned. A more rapid introduction of new technology would ensure more efficient and - in the long run - more cost-effective conference services. It would be worth while if productivity gains from the introduction of new technology could be quantified.

26. With respect to the installation of a signalling system whenever a speech time-limit was established, her delegation supported the concept of establishing time-limits, since time and resources could be saved if statements were concise. At the same time, too rigid an application of time-limits could render simultaneous interpretation impossible because of too rapid a delivery of statements.

(Ms. Rotheiser, Austria)

27. In the matter of planning of meetings and conferences, although the planning function of the Secretariat had constantly been enhanced over the years, there was room for improvement. Meetings and conferences should be spread more evenly throughout the year and the entire system so as to allow optimum utilization of conference services. In that context, her delegation especially supported the recommended change of date of the twenty-sixth session of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law in order to avoid an overlap with the World Conference on Human Rights.

28. Improved planning would ensure a more efficient use of conference resources. That improved planning, however, was not the sole responsibility of Member States, but also of the bureaux of the various bodies. Her delegation explicitly supported the recommendation of the Committee on Conferences that the cost per hour of meeting time should be brought to the attention of the members of all United Nations organs.

29. Mr. BENNETT (United States of America) said that, as in previous years, the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/47/32) failed to provide significant recommendations, a fact which was regrettable but indicative of the declining effectiveness of that body in fulfilling its responsibiliy for overseeing the Organization's largest programme.

30. The Committee was not solely responsible for that state of affairs. The General Assembly had adopted measures to limit the authority of the Committee, despite recommendations by the Group of 18 designed to strengthen its role. Other United Nations bodies ignored many of the established rules and regulations governing conference services and generally failed to respond to requests by the Committee and the General Assembly to limit the use of such services. The effort to restructure the intergovernmental decision-making process in the economic and social areas, as recommended by the Group of 18, was an excellent example of the lack of progress in reducing spending on conference services.

31. At its forty-sixth session, the General Assembly had asked all intergovernmental bodies to take steps to improve the utilization of conference services. The measures taken were to be reported to the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences and analysed by the Secretariat. The Committee on Conferences had not received a report on the matter. He would like to know what steps the Secretariat had taken to implement the directive in question and whether any replies had been received. The General Assembly should renew its appeal and insist that the Secretariat, the chairmen of all intergovernmental bodies and the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences should take immediate action to reduce conference-servicing requirements.

32. It was disappointing that the governing bodies of UNDP, UNICEF and UNHCR had made no serious effort to reduce their conference-servicing requirements and had ignored the appeals made by the General Assembly in that regard.

(Mr. Bennett, United States)

33. It was also disappointing that the Committee on Conferences had failed to agree on the biennialization of its meetings. Given the limited impact of its current work, it was doubtful whether the resources provided to the Committee each year were well used. Unless the Committee could become more productive and play a stronger leadership role, the biennialization of its meetings should remain under consideration.

34. One of the few specific recommendations made by the Committee on Conferences was the installation of signalling devices in conference rooms to enforce time-limits on speakers. Although his delegation did not oppose the measure, it could not accept the costly proposal put forward by the Secretariat in document A/47/287. The same results could be achieved at much less or no cost to the Organization. The General Assembly should therefore reject the Secretary-General's proposal and ask him to consider less costly means of controlling the length of speeches.

35. The report of the Secretary-General concerning the working methods, organizational structure and technological innovations in the Office of Conference Services (A/47/336) proposed only limited changes. That was a disappointing outcome, since an opportunity for achieving significant streamlining had been missed. Nevertheless, the report revealed major shortcomings in the management of conference resources.

36. The report outlined a number of problems affecting conference services, many of which were claimed to be beyond the control of the Office. The uneven distribution of meetings throughout the year and the late submission of poorly drafted documents by substantive offices were two of the external factors affecting the performance of the Office. The Office should make specific proposals to the General Assembly that would modify the calendar and even out the distribution of meetings. Intergovernmental bodies should not be allowed to set schedules that suited their particular interests, irrespective of the difficulties it might cause for conference services. The Office should develop and enforce new standards for the submission of documents by substantive offices. The chronic problem of late submission of documents could be addressed by ensuring that failures to meet deadlines were recorded in the evaluation reports of the officials responsible. Repeated failures should be grounds for denial of promotion or even dismissal.

37. The Secretary-General should take steps to improve utilization of interpretation services which was currently low because of frequent cancellation of meetings. Reductions should be proposed in the conference services allocated to bodies with poor utilization rates. In addition, the Secretariat should insist that more bodies meet on an "as available" basis, in order to take advantage of the services available as a result of the high rate of cancellation of meetings. That would reduce the number of interpreters needed and ensure better utilization of resources. The Secretariat should also implement new procedures to utilize more fully permanent interpretation staff at all duty stations, thereby reducing the amount spent on temporary staff.

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38. A further reason for the late submission of documents was the current organization of editorial functions. The previous year's report on the subject had proposed only minor changes and was an example of the Secretariat's reluctance to make significant changes that would enhance productivity. Current problems were also related to questionable personnel decisions. Staffing in the office responsible for editing General Assembly documentation had been reduced by the transfer of staff to peace-keeping operations. While high priority must be given to peace-keeping operations, management must also take into account the possible negative impact the absence of certain staff could have on regular operations.

39. Staff shortages and lack of office space were cited as reasons for low productivity in the translation service. If the Secretariat believed that there were insufficient terminologists, then it should recruit those professionals by redeploying resources made available through the elimination of unnecessary or marginal jobs within the Office or the Secretariat as a whole. The Secretariat could also address the problem of lack of office space. Given that Secretariat staff had supposedly been cut by 12 per cent, more office space could have been allocated to the translation service.

40. The report did not deal adequately with the United Nations publications programme. Instead of proposing cutbacks in unnecessary publications, the report implied that the programme might be expanded. Paragraph 19 suggested that profits from the sale of publications could be allocated to the Sales Section to upgrade its activities. Such a proposal could be difficult to implement, given that the sale of publications produced losses estimated at almost $1 million in the 1992-1993 budget.

41. The section of the report devoted to technological innovations was also deficient in many respects. Overall, it would appear that the Secretariat was focusing on the acquisition of new, highly sophisticated technologies such as videoconferencing and machine assisted translation, despite the inadequacy of word-processing equipment. Paragraph 28 stated that resource constraints had made it necessary to introduce workstations in an uneven manner, and that the absence of a Headquarters-wide wiring infrastructure had impeded the movement of documents electronically. Those problems should be resolved before investing in more costly technologies which might not prove worth while. Nevertheless, his delegation would consider supporting the proposals for the acquisition of expensive office and telecommunications equipment, if the Secretariat could demonstrate that such investments were cost-effective. In the past, the Secretariat had not provided cost benefit analyses to justify its investment decisions; he hoped that any future proposals would include such information.

42. The report of the Secretary-General did not adequately address the question of workload standards. General Assembly resolution 45/248 requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to the forty-seventh session on the elaboration of unified workload standards for conference-servicing staff and

(Mr. Bennett, United States)

on progress made in the further development of such standards. Unfortunately, the list of documents for the Fifth Committee did not mention such a report. His delegation would appreciate a response from the Secretariat on the status of work in that area and on when the report of the Secretary-General would be issued.

43. The efficiency of the Office of Conference Services could and must be increased. While the recommendations of the Secretary-General and the Committee on Conferences were useful, they did not go far enough. The General Assembly should recommend that the review started in 1992 should be continued with the assistance of outside management experts. Future studies should focus on workload standards, technological innovations and investments, drafting and editorial functions, and document reproduction and distribution. In order to formulate a proposal, the Fifth Committee needed to receive as soon as possible the report prepared by the Management Advisory Service which might contain useful recommendations not reflected in the report of the Secretary-General.

44. His delegation was concerned that conferences and meetings had become an end in themselves. The proliferation of United Nations organs and bodies, the increasing length and complexity of agendas and the enormous volume of documentation had reached a point where progress on most critical issues was almost impossible. Member States had created that unmanageable situation and bore primary responsibility for finding a solution. It was time to take seriously the voluminous regulations governing conference services and resolve to implement them immediately. That would reduce the number of meetings held and documents produced.

45. All delegations must begin to consider whether calls for new conferences, meetings and reports were justified in view of the Secretariat's heavy workload. Funds spent on meetings and reports meant fewer services for the people the Organization was meant to serve, the citizens of Member States. The suggestion of the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management that no further world-wide conferences should be held until 1995 merited the full support of the General Assembly. Such conferences absorbed a very substantial part of the Organization's resources without necessarily providing significant benefits.

46. The General Assembly should request the Secretary-General to provide the Committee on Conferences with information on those committees, reports and services which, in his view, were wasteful, unproductive or had failed to meet expectations. Such information, together with proposals for corrective action, should enable the Committee on Conferences to submit recommendations to the forty-eighth session which would have a meaningful impact on the conference services budget.

47. The Assembly should also request each United Nations subsidiary organ to undertake, within the next two years, an in-depth analysis of its mandate in

(Mr. Bennett, United States)

order to determine whether it remained valid. Many United Nations bodies were no longer relevant to current political, economic and social conditions and should be abolished. The results of such reviews, together with recommendations, should be included, in the reports of each body to its respective intergovernmental body. The Secretary-General should also inform the Committee on Conferences of the progress achieved in that connection.

48. While Member States were largely responsible for the unfortunate state of affairs, the Secretariat must also accept its share of the blame. The Secretariat needed to exercise much stronger leadership in putting forward measures to enhance efficiency and eliminate much of the waste that characterized the intergovernmental decision-making process. In 1993, in the context of the further review of the conference service operations and in the light of the information requested from the Secretary-General on wasteful practices of individual committees, concrete proposals were expected that would make appreciable progress in reducing expenditures on that activity.

49. Unless the attitudes of Member States and the Secretariat towards the use of conference services changed, the United Nations would be unable to become the positive force for change which the world community demanded.

50. Mr. STAVRINOS (Cyprus) said that for the past few years the financial situation of the United Nations had been an ever-increasing problem and had inhibited the effective functioning of the Organization. Member States, Secretariat officials and collective bodies, in particular the Fifth Committee, must help find a solution to that problem.

51. Conference services were indispensable to the functioning of the United Nations and accounted for almost one fifth of the regular budget. Given the financial problems facing the Organization, it was most important that conference-servicing facilities be used in the most rational, efficient and cost-effective way. His delegation therefore supported the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences regarding the continued review of the Office of Conference Services in accordance with General Assembly resolution 46/190.

52. The question of documentation was of paramount importance for minimizing the excessive use of resources. Despite the application of technological innovations, which significantly improved the ability to produce documents, the ever-increasing demand regularly required additional resources. Within the Organization, the problem could be tackled by following the rules and regulations in force. The question of requests by Member States for communications to be circulated as official documents was different. Although Member States had the sovereign right to request circulation of their communications as official documents, that right should follow the relevant rules of international law and inter-State practice. In view of the Organization's grave economic difficulties and the common responsibility to contribute to their alleviation, Member States must adhere more strictly to the legitimate restrictions and limitations on their right to request the

(Mr. Stavrinos, Cyprus)

circulation of documents, among them the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council.

53. Some Member States, for their own policy reasons, continued to ignore the United Nations decisions and recommendations on documentation. That behaviour was even more provocative when those States abused their sovereign right by requesting the circulation of communications prepared by illegal entities or entities characterized by the Security Council as "legally invalid". Such a practice was also unfair to those Member States which respected the legitimate restrictions and exercised every possible restraint in order to assist the Organization in overcoming its financial difficulties.

54. It was time that the Joint Inspection Unit was requested to undertake a study of the translation, editing, printing, reproduction and circulation of United Nations documents and formulate specific recommendations.

55. The contribution of Cyprus to solving the problem lay in its strict adherence to the relevant resolutions and recommendations and its application of every possible restraint in the exercise of the right to submit documents. His delegation urged all Member States and the members of the Secretariat to abide strictly by the directives in force and to join in the common effort to lead the Organization out of its current financial difficulties.

56. Mr. RAZVIN (Russian Federation) said he shared the concern expressed by the Office of the Assistant Secretary-General for Conference Services and mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/47/1, para. 21) that the volume of available resources had not kept pace with the rapid expansion of the Organization's activities. The problem was particularly acute in the Office of Conference Services and vigorous steps must be taken to halt the rise in conference-servicing costs, within the context of the restructuring of the Secretariat and of the new tasks and requirements facing the Organization.

57. The Committee on Conferences should concentrate on regulating (and thereby reducing) the number and duration of conferences and meetings of United Nations organs; keeping tight control of the steady increase in the volume of documentation, which would mean carrying out an in-depth analysis of the usefulness of certain documents and the appropriateness of issuing them; coordinating conference activities and applying common sense to the use of the resources available throughout the United Nations system; implementing a sensible publications policy and evaluating the usefulness of certain publications from the standpoint of their cost to the Organization and their value to users.

58. The Committee on Conferences should be able to count on the strong support of the General Assembly, particularly the Fifth Committee, and should receive clear instructions in the context of resolutions on the agenda item in question.

(Mr. Razvin, Russian Federation)

59. In accordance with the biennial cycle of its programme of work, the Committee on Conferences had devoted particular attention in 1992 to documentation-related issues, which were of concern to many delegations since they involved the quality and timely submission of the documents that formed the basis of the work of the Committees of the General Assembly. Regrettably, the situation in that regard had not improved. He agreed with the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management that that situation should not be allowed to continue. Member States must work together to solve the problem of increasing documentation. The large volume of documents they produced overburdened the Office of Conference Services and resulted in the late issuance of poor quality documents. Member States should exercise restraint and circumspection in requesting conference services.

60. In general, the Committee on Conferences had examined those problems satisfactorily, and its report showed that it had done everything possible to analyse the document production process and pinpoint the factors that hampered document preparation and submission. None the less, some of the Committee's recommendations should be strengthened by increasing their specificity and defining their orientation more precisely. That was particularly true of the recommendations on the 32-page limit, on the six-week rule for the issuance of pre-session documentation and on the more efficient utilization of conference-servicing resources in general.

61. His delegation supported the idea of introducing comprehensive indices of the cost per hour of meeting time, and of bringing that information to the attention of the members of all United Nations organs. Such a measure would contribute to imposing discipline in the use of conference services and to obtaining considerable resource savings without compromising quality.

62. Continued efforts to achieve compliance with the 32-page limit would produce positive results. In that regard, it was necessary to take a close look at the work of a number of organs that received summary records and still continued to submit lengthy reports in excess of the 32-page limit.

63. He applauded the measures taken by the Secretariat to coordinate conference activities throughout the system in order to rationalize the use of the Organization's conference-servicing and human resources. However, it would be useful to have a better idea of the role played in that area by the Administrative Committee on Coordination, the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions and the Interagency Meetings on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications. The Secretariat should give close, constructive attention to the experience and possibilities of those mechanisms.

64. His delegation noted with satisfaction the approach taken in the report of the Committee on Conferences to the question of translation quality and the publication of documents. In view of the principle of the equality of all the official and working languages of the General Assembly, the Secretariat should

(Mr. Razvin, Russian Federation)

be asked to take steps to improve the quality of documents in Russian, which should accurately reflect the original texts. The Secretariat had highly qualified translators and editors for that purpose, and it would be a waste of its human resources not to use them for the benefit of the Organization. In that connection, his delegation also supported the idea, expressed in the statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management, of developing a better performance evaluation system, including a review of the complex and consequently inefficient rebuttal process. The Secretariat's administrative procedures in those areas should be made more flexible and his delegation supported the efforts of the Secretary-General in that regard.

65. His delegation supported the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee on Conferences regarding the review of the Office of Conference Services and thought that the report of the Secretary-General (A/47/336) was a constructive contribution to the ongoing analysis of the Office's structure.

66. Mr. VARELA (Chile) said that improving the meeting support system would help to facilitate the work of delegations, increase their efficiency and effectiveness and achieve the objectives of the Organization. Despite existing constraints, the Secretariat performed well, especially if one bore in mind the increased workload created by the revitalization of the role of the United Nations in international affairs and the lack of technological resources resulting from the budgetary difficulties that the Organization had been experiencing for a number of years.

67. His delegation endorsed the report of the Committee on Conferences and believed that maintaining the overall duration and annual periodicity of the Committee's sessions was very important if it was to fulfil the mandate given it by the General Assembly, although a biennial cycle might be adopted for certain items. It was also important to insist that the Secretariat take appropriate steps to ensure the timely distribution of the necessary pre-session documentation simultaneously in all the official languages. In addition, it would be a good idea if a report on the state of documentation could be distributed together with the annotated agenda for the session in question. Doing so would have an impact on the preparation of agenda items, the level of the discussions and the consequent effectiveness of contributions and suggestions.

68. It was necessary to reduce the number and overall volume of reports throughout the United Nations system. The pace of work at regular sessions made it difficult to read the documentation, which led to a waste of resources and time that must be avoided.

69. It also seemed logical to devote maximum attention to the Committee's recommendations and guidelines to the General Assembly with respect to encouraging all United Nations organs to use conference resources as fully and effectively as possible. That would require good planning and a responsible attitude on the part of the members of those organs. It was important that

(Mr. Varela, Chile)

subsidiary organs to consult the Office of Conference Services on the availability of resources before formulating or revising their recommendations on the dates or frequency of meetings.

70. Using an appropriate methodology to develop a notional cost per hour of meeting time that included all services involved would be most useful. That indicative amount, combined with the implementation of the Committee's recommendation to instal a system for signalling speech time-limits, would help to make the best use of the system's resources.

71. For the meetings and conferences of the United Nations to receive the required support, it was necessary to have not only balanced budgets and rationalized functions but also the capacity to provide logistical support for the work of delegations at the Organization's various headquarters. Developing that capacity was a very important, long-term task that, as it was gradually fulfilled, would contribute decisively to achieving the objectives of the United Nations. In that respect, the Organization could count on the cooperation of Chile and its delegation.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.